

MORE CARE FOR OLD, DISABLED URGED

PM: Don't abandon the helpless

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today criticised the "dole mentality" prevalent among relatives of the handicapped and aged.

He said the majority of old folk and the handicapped had families and relatives who would not share the burden of looking after their needs, forgetting their existence the moment they were sent to the Welfare Department or voluntary organisations.

He said: "The Government and the social organisations may provide the necessary aid and assistance but not the kind of care and affection their families and relatives can give.

"They seem to forget that as people of the East we still hold dearly to the extended family system. Let's not lose this Eastern heritage by being so uncaring on such familial matters."

Opening the first national seminar on social welfare at the Putra World Trade Centre, Dr Mahathir said this attitude was one of the negative effects of subsidies.

"Our society has to a certain extent been pampered and spoilt by the various types of subsidy schemes and aid made available by the Government."

He said the public must not depend entirely on the Government and voluntary organisations to look after the welfare of

their unfortunate relatives.

"But the fact is that the families of the unfortunates take the load off their shoulders and leave everything to the Government."

He regarded them as among those people who lived on subsidies and had developed the "dole mentality."

He said the Government was reviewing certain subsidy schemes and other aid policies to ensure that they would not obstruct the objective of building a strong and independent society.

Self-help

In future, he said, the Government would provide only temporary aid for the unfortunate. This would only be given during a period of training to prepare them to lead productive lives.

"But it does not mean the Government has no conscience for the welfare of those in dire need of life-long help."

He said he realised that aid given to the unfortunate could not be compared with subsidies for farmers and the poor.

"The Government realises that the unfortunate are mainly the handicapped, blind, or mistreated children and women.

"But such weaknesses as these do not mean the end of everything for them. Those with high spirits ought to be able to help themselves.

"This is where voluntary organisations come in; to assist and train the unfortunates until they are able to restore their morale and cease to be a burden to others. The Government will provide aid only during the training."

Welfare Services Minister Datuk Shahrir Abdul Samad and Federal Territory Minister Datuk Abu Hassan Haji Omar, were present at the ceremony.

Three working papers would be discussed at the two-day seminar for about 200 participants representing Government departments and the various voluntary organisations.

The seminar is jointly organised by the Welfare Services Ministry, the National Welfare Foundation and the National Social Welfare Council.

The Prime Minister's wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Ali, presented a working paper on *The Role of Voluntary Organisations* in the afternoon session.

She spoke of the need for social workers to improve their skills and professionalism to upgrade their services to the community.

She said the growing need for better and effective community services called for greater joint efforts in training and manpower between Government departments and voluntary organisations.

By ALI HAMDAN